

Throw Your Net on the Other Side
John 21:1-14/#thegospelofjohn

From the very first sin in Genesis to Babel to the golden calf to Israel's ongoing rebellion to the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' time, we are self-deceived into believing that we don't need God.

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD... Thus says the LORD, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD... Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." (Jeremiah 9:23-24, 17:5, Psalm 127:1-2).

Scripture proclaims over and over that we have not, cannot, and will not ever direct our lives. We are not in control or self-sufficient or independent of our Creator and God. We have not, cannot, and will not ever accomplish what God has called us to do without His resources, and our total dependence on Him for every breath we have.

Most of Jesus' disciples were rugged and worn fishermen by the Sea of Galilee. It's no surprise that Peter leads six other disciples (Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two others) back to the Sea of Galilee to fish (21:1-3). It's here where the Apostle John records once again the great contrast between our own self-effort and the power and provision of our resurrected Savior.

**Working but getting nowhere?
Listen to Jesus' voice and do whatever He tells you to do.**

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. Now this is how he did so. ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael (who was from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee (James & John), and two other disciples of his were together. ³ Simon Peter told them, "I am going fishing." "We will go with you," they replied. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴ When it was already very early morning, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ So Jesus said to them, "Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" They replied, "No." ⁶ He told them, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they threw the net, and were not able to pull it in because of the large number of fish. ⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" So Simon Peter, when he heard that it was the Lord, tucked in his outer garment (for he had nothing on underneath it), and plunged into the sea. ⁸ Meanwhile the other disciples came with the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from land, only about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they got out on the beach, they saw a charcoal fire ready with a fish placed on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you have just now caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three, but although there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² "Come, have breakfast," Jesus said. But none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. (John 21:1-14)

Can you only imagine the color of the sky reflected on the surface of the Sea of Galilee that morning? The spectacular sunrise occurs, a great fiery ball coming up over the Golan Heights, and there Jesus stands on the shore of the lake (vs. 4) representing a new day, full of beauty and possibility.

Jesus asks the seven, "You don't have any fish do you?" (vs. 5). The seven, exhausted, shivering and defeated from an all-night fishing excursion, had nothing to show for it (vs. 5). Jesus tells them, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat" and they humbly respond and trust Jesus. Miraculously, the nets were filled with 153 fish and not torn (earlier in Luke 5 the nets tear) and there is enough to feed the whole village.

John highlights two contrasting statements in response to this miracle: 1) John says, "It is the Lord!" (vs. 7) and 2) "Who are you?" (vs. 12).

NT Wright says, "Jesus was the same but different. We don't know what Jesus was wearing. We don't know what his face looked like. Jesus passed through death and possessed a resurrected body. He had been where nobody had ever been before and nobody has yet been since. His body was no longer subject to decay or death, and that is what He promises to us as well."

It would have been easier for Peter if Jesus had walked on the water and gotten into the boat like He did in John 6, but instead Jesus stays on the shore and waits for them. Peter couldn't wait, tucks in his outer garment and jumps in to get to Jesus. He leaves the other disciples with the task of rowing a boat filled with 153 fish (vs. 7-8).

On the shore is where Jesus had a charcoal fire going and bread and fish already cooking (vs. 9-14). Defeated and exhausted from the night, how good did that food taste? Jesus says in Revelation 3:20 - I'm knocking, hear my voice and let me in and I will come in and dine with you and you with me. Jesus wants to eat with us and love us and provide for us.

Not only that, but Jesus has big plans for His disciples. In John 20:21-23 Jesus explains how they will now be filled with God's breath, the Holy Spirit, and sent into the world as Jesus had been sent. Anyone who comes under the authority of the Gospel they would be preaching would experience forgiveness. But if they try to do it their own way, they will fail. They will toil all night and take nothing. The only way is for them to admit defeat, listen to Jesus' voice and do what He says.

Working but getting nowhere?

We think if we don't do it, it won't be done. We think if we don't change the world, the world won't be changed. We imagine God waiting passively for us to do something great so that His agenda can press forward. This simply is not true. His agenda is moving forward with or without us, and He lovingly invites us to come along for the ride.

Of course we are to work hard and be equipped, learn and grow. In fact, we should be the hardest working people on this planet, burning through the grace of God like we are formula one racers. But if God is not building the house, if God is not guarding the city, we are in trouble (Psalm 127:1-2). Our job is to find our place in God's work and to play our role well through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Is there something in your life that you have been working on but getting nowhere?

Are you relentless in your correction of your wife or husband or kids, thinking, if I just press hard enough I will see change?

Are you refusing to enter into conflict with humility because you fear being taken advantage of?

Are you grinding away at your way, your agenda, your control at work, convinced this is the only way forward?

Have you been on your boat, working all night long, all year long, all decade long and getting nowhere? Have you been putting the net on the wrong side of the boat?

What is Jesus telling you to do from the shore?

Are you responding, "No, Jesus, that can't be the solution, that doesn't make sense to me! If I do that or say that, this will happen or that will happen."

We, like the disciples, can fish all night and catch nothing and then the resurrected Savior stands on the shore and says, try the right side and everything changes. He is the same one who can cause 153 fish to appear in our nets when none were found before, and He is the same one who makes us breakfast when we are tired, weary and exhausted.

Listen to Jesus' voice and do whatever he tells you to do.

Watch Him move His loving and gracious plan forward.